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1961 Crop Prospects in Communist China

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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1961 CROP PROSPECTS IN COMMUNIST CHINA

Crop prospects for 1961 in Communist China are not favorable. It is estimated that the total grain output will probably approximate the level of 185* million tons estimated for 1960.

Since autumn of 1960 the country has been afflicted over wide areas by extremes of weather. Although the areas affected by floods and drought do not appear to be as extensive as in 1960, the regions most seriously affected in 1961 have been those which account for a major share of the country's grain production. Other factors tending to complicate the agricultural situation have been the cumulative effects of three years of drought in North China, peasant discontent, and the debilitating effects on the agricultural labor force of short food rations during the winter and spring of 1960/61.

Beginning in the spring of 1961 Chinese Communist reports have been pessimistic in tone with respect to weather and crop conditions. Although the publication of a steady flow of melancholy reports of adverse weather and crop conditions may have been designed initially to condition the populace for a continuation of short food rations in 1961/62, the crop situation as of August appears to bear out their pessimism.

The Chinese Communists have published no statistics on production this year, but the 1961 winter wheat harvest was probably the smallest in several years. This was due mainly to poor planting conditions in the fall of 1960 and a continuation of drought conditions in the major winter wheat areas of North China throughout the winter and spring of 1960/61. Late planting of 50 percent of the wheat crop resulted in a considerable reduction in yield due to winter kill. Further yield reductions occurred as a result of low winter moisture and very dry spring. The acreage sown to winter wheat in 1960 is believed to have been the smallest since the communists came to power. A People's Daily editorial on 15 February 1961 implied that the acreage of winter wheat was only 20 million hectares as compared to 24 million hectares in 1959/60, a decrease of around 17 percent. The late planting and reduced acreage of wheat were caused in part by the late maturing of summer crops on the wheat land. It is possible that seed shortages and peasant apathy were also factors.

The persistent drought in most of North China, which affected the winter wheat crop, was eased by heavy rains in late July which were too late to help the wheat. Although these rains improved the prospects for the miscellaneous grain crops, they caused serious flooding in Shantung which probably resulted in serious damage to summer grains and industrial crops, particularly peanuts.

Rains accompanied by winds and hail also reportedly did considerable damage to crops, primarily soybeans and coarse grains, in the Northeast provinces of Liaoning, Kirin and Heilungkiang.

Weather conditions in South China were relatively good during the spring and summer, particularly in Kwangtung, which reportedly harvested a better than average rice crop.

The size of the grain crop in 1961 will be greatly affected by the late rice crop of Central and East China, which will not be harvested until October and November. This rice area bordering the Yangtze

*Including tubers converted to grain at a ratio of 4 to 1.

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River comprises the provinces of Hunan, Kiangsi, Hupeh, Chekiang, Anhwei and Kiangsu, and accounts for around 52 percent of the rice acreage in the country. Drought conditions have been reported in this area throughout the spring and summer. The seriousness of the drought is apparent from precipitation and soil moisture data which indicated that during the critical growing periods of April through August 1961, rainfall was below normal and soil moisture reserves were generally lower than during the corresponding period of 1960. The situation in Hupeh, an important rice producing province, is said to be worse than in 1959 or 1960.

Unless conditions improve in the Yangtze rice area the prospects for any significant improvement in food supplies during 1961/62 are dim. The regime may be hard pressed to prevent a further deterioration in grain ration levels next winter and spring and in 1962 may have to purchase more grain than the 5.5 million tons contracted for delivery this year.

Another winter of short rations would probably result in a further deterioration in the health of the population and a corresponding decrease in labor effort. Such a situation would further complicate the agricultural recovery plans of the regime, which during 1960/61 have been characterized by an increase in the allocation of capital investment to agriculture, decentralization of communal functions and increased incentives to the peasants.

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Sources:

This report was based upon a large number of sources which are available on file in M/AG.

*Does not contain any
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